Online MFA Handbook
Department of Creative Writing

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Content

Introduction

Welcome to the Bilingual MFA in Creative Writing. This handbook is intended to provide you with information that will make it easier to navigate your way through the following years of study at UTEP. Consult the Contents (page 2) for the information you are looking for.

If the information you are looking for is not in Contents, try the Frequently Asked Questions section (https://www.utep.edu/liberalarts/creative-writing/academic-programs/online/faqs.html). Finally, if the information you are looking for is not
in this handbook, contact the Online MFA staff at onlinemfa@utep.edu or the Online MFA Director, Prof. Sylvia Aguilar-Zéleny at saguilar8@utep.edu

The Creative Writing Department

The Creative Writing Department at UTEP was created to foster intellectual and creative growth for students pursuing an undergraduate major or minor in creative writing, and a MFA in creative writing both on campus and online.

Our MFA in Creative Writing is the only one of its kind in the world, and it attracts students—from the US, Latin America and beyond— who want to pursue their development as writers in a uniquely situated university and intellectual community. Bilingualism is not a requirement, but we value the co-existence of Spanish and English in the same classroom, so you will be reading a lot of creative and theoretical work in translation. Now, if you would like to submit work in Spanish, discuss it with your professor.

Our main Faculty for the Online MFA are: Dr. Andrea Cote-Botero, Dr. Nelson Cárdenas, Dr. Jeff Sirkin, Prof. Daniel Chacón, Prof. Sylvia Aguilar-Zéleny, Prof. Tim Hernández, and Prof. Sasha Pimentel. From time to time, we invite lecturers to teach one or two semesters with us. We are currently honored to have Prof. Jessica Powers to teach Children, Middle-Grade and Young Adult and Prof. JD Pluecker to teach Poetry and Studies in Form in our program.

Curriculum

Our program is designed to be completed in three years. However, the University policy allows for a student to complete their Masters in six years. Students have the flexibility to take as little as one class per semester and must keep at least a 3.0 GPA in order to stay in the program.

Some courses, such as those required for first-year students or thesis hours for third-year students, must be taken in the corresponding semesters. The order in which
you take the other courses will depend on your overall plans for your
MFA, which you should discuss with our team.

The program curriculum is comprised of 48 credit hours or 16 courses. Each class is valued at 3 credit hours.

Course Type	Satisfied By	Courses	Credit Hours
Required Gateway	CRW 5321	1	3
	CRW 5364	1	3
	CRW 5365	1	3
Workshop		5	15
Literature		4	12
Electives		2	6
Thesis I	CRW 5398	1	3
Thesis II	CRW 5399	1	3
Total		16	48

The program offers courses in Fall, Spring, and Summer semesters. This creates the flexibility for a student to choose their pace to complete their Masters.

Note: A student taking Required Gateway courses is considered to be in their *First Year. Second Year* students will continue their coursework with Workshop, Literature, and Elective courses. *Third Year* students are those taking Thesis I or Thesis II.

Coursework

Required Gateway (9 hours)

These courses are required to be taken within the student's first attending year.

Course Type	Satisfied By	Courses Offered	Requirement
Required Gateway	CRW 5321	Narrative Theory & Poetics	1 course 3 credit hours
	CRW 5364	Forms & Techniques of Fiction	1 course 3 credit hours
	CRW 5365	Forms & Techniques of Poetry	1 course 3 credit hours

Remaining courses

After the student completes the required gateway courses, the student will work with their advisor to fulfill the rest of the program's curriculum based on the student's focus.
Keep in mind, a student finishing their *First Year* courses can choose what courses to take given their focus. A student focusing on poetry will most likely choose courses fitted to poetry. However, the area of focus does not prohibit a student from taking a course in another area. In the previous mentioned example, a student focused on poetry is free to take a class in fiction or screenwriting.

Workshops (15 hours)

Although a student can look forward to writing in every class of the program, Workshop courses are what enable a student to hone in on their area of interest. Workshop courses are designed

for the student to create content that will be read, reviewed, and edited throughout the course.

The student is required to choose five courses from the list below and can take a course up to three times. For example, a student focusing in fiction writing can take CRW 5366, Advanced Fiction Writing, up to three times to fulfill their Workshop requirement. This possibility is not a requirement. Referring to the same example, the student focused on fiction writing can take five different courses from the ones referenced in the table below, including poetry, children's literature, or variable topics.

Course Type	Courses Offered		
Workshop	CRW 5381	Writing Children's Literature *	5 hours/ 15 Credit hours
	CRW 5366	Advanced Fiction Writing	
	CRW 5367	Advanced Poetry Writing	
	CRW 5368	Variable Topics *	
	CRW 5369	Advanced Playwriting	
	CRW 5371	Writing the Novel	
	CRW 5372	Advanced Screenwriting	

| | CRW 5373 | Advanced Creative Nonfiction | |
| | CRW 5374 | Ten Problems for the Fiction Writer | |

Literature (12 hours)

These courses require reading at least six book-length works, and an analytical final project; they may also include creative assignments.

Course Type	Courses Offered		
Literature	CRW 5368	Variable Topics * (if run as Literature rather than Workshop Course	4 hours/ 12 Credit hours
	CRW 5370	Literary Translation *	
	CRW 5367	Advanced Poetry Writing	
	CRW 5368	Variable Topics *	
	CRW 5375	Writing Comics and Visual Cultural *	

	CRW 5376	Writing about Popular Music	
	CRW 5377	Rewriting America since the 1960's	
	CRW 5378	The Politics of Narration	
	CRW 5379	Kafka and the Art of Fiction	

Course Type	Courses Offered		
Literature	CRW 5380	The Physics of Creative Writing	4 hours/ 12 Credit hours
	CRW 5382	Studies in Form	
	CRW 5383	The History of the Short-Story *	
	CRW 5384	Forms in the Prose Poem and the Short Story *	
	CRW 5385	Forms in the Contemporary Short-Story *	
	CRW 5386	Minding Fiction	

	CRW 5387	Contemporary Latin American Novel*	
	CRW 5388	Storytelling in Film and Literature	
	CRW 5389	High Modernism in Latin America	

Note: The class CRW 5368 Variable Topics and CRW 5382 Studies in Form are Literature courses with a different thematic content each semester. Check the Course Catalog before you enroll. The asterisk (*) marks courses not yet in the official UTEP catalog.

Electives (6 hours)

As part of the curriculum, a student must take two elective courses. Courses that are considered electives are any of the Workshop or Literature courses mentioned in the previous sections.

Elective courses can also be taken from another department outside of the Creative Writing Department. However, the student must reach out to the corresponding department and ensure their enrollment in that course. The only requirement is that electives must be graduate courses from UTEP.

Course Type	Courses	Credit Hours
Electives	Any Workshop or Literature course mentioned in the previous sections. And/or Any graduate-level course offered at UTEP.	2 courses 6 credit hours

Independent Study (3 hours)

This is not a course per se, but a way of taking a course, and it is designed to allow your development as a writer. You can take an independent study with any faculty member with your advisor's approval.

See the Independent Study Guidelines (page 9) for more details.

Thesis I & II (6 hours)

Students will take Thesis I and Thesis II during their last year in the program. They may take an additional course alongside Thesis I, but Thesis II must be taken alone. You will find information on Thesis courses and Defense on page 12.

Course Type	Courses	Credit Hours

Thesis I	CRW 5398 Workshop-style class	1 course 3 credit hours
Thesis II	CRW 5399 Class taken by the student and led by their Thesis Director	1 course 3 credit hours

Independent Study Guidelines

As said before, an Independent Study may replace a workshop, variable topics or literature course. Independent study is designed to allow you to explore a particular area of interest not offered as a regular course during your three years in the program. Again, you are not required to take an Independent Study, nor are you guaranteed one. Some factors to consider:

- Make sure you ask for an Independent Study within the area of interest, research or creative work of the professor you ask.
- Independent studies must be requested a semester before the academic year it is taken, so once you have thought of a theme/form and you have thought of a professor to work with, discuss with them this possibility.

Prior to registering in your Independent Study, you need to present a proposal. The proposal must be approved by the professor you will be taking the Independent Study with, and by the Director of Graduate Studies. Your Independent Study Proposal will consist of the following:

- A brief letter stating how the proposed Independent Study will contribute
to your development as a writer or to the writing of your thesis.
- A detailed syllabus for the course. The syllabus may follow any format, but it must include: an introduction, a list of readings, means of evaluation, a list of assignments, a weekly break down of readings, evaluations and assignments.

Advising

Communication & Scheduling

The Online MFA team can be reached at onlinemfa@utep.edu. Most communication will be done via email. Because of the size of our team, please expect a reply within 24 hours. For phone calls, at the beginning of each semester, a communication will be sent with office hours and a staff member's name that can schedule a time to speak with you over the phone.

Degree Evaluations

It is the student's responsibility to retrieve the information regarding their degree advancement. The UTEP Goldmine system allows for every student to download their degree evaluations. A degree evaluation has the details regarding the courses taken by the student.

At the beginning of every semester, a presentation will be sent with instructions on how to retrieve your personal degree evaluation. This document will help the student and advisor know where the student stands in their program track. If you need access to your degree evaluation, email onlinemfa@utep.edu requesting for a copy of the guide to retrieving degree evaluations from Goldmine.

Emails

When emailing the Online MFA team, please make sure to complete the following:
1. Include the student ID, this number is important to identify the student, and
2. Write from your @miners.utep.edu student email.

Registration

All courses have a maximum capacity of 16 students. We plan for every student to enter the courses of their choice. However, it is

possible for a student to have to wait for a semester if the course is at maximum capacity.

Before registration, a student has holds placed on their account by the UTEP Goldmine system. It is the job of the advisor to *lift advising and registration holds per student and course every semester* to allow for the student's registration. The student may not be able to register until holds have been lifted. It is the student's responsibility to provide their Student ID and CRN(s) for the courses they wish to take.

For an easier registration process, the student must send the following information:
1. Student ID,
2. Degree Evaluation (see subsection below), and
3. List of preferred Course Numbers (CRNs) and Course Categories (CRWs) for each class.

Note: The curriculum courses are tagged by CRW (Creative Writing) four-digit numbers, but the student advisor requires the class specific five-digit CRN (course number). See the image below for reference.

As an example, to clarify the difference between the two numbers, in a given semester, there may be two CRW 5368 courses being taught, but the CRN is what distinguishes the two.

Forms & Techniques of Fiction - 15727 - CRW 5364 - 005

Degree Evaluation

Always download a screenshot or PDF of your degree evaluation and attach it to your registration email. This is especially important during registration periods where the advisor needs to know what classes the student is allowed to take based on what the student has taken in the past.

The student can email onlinemfa@utep.edu for a step-by-step presentation on how to get their degree evaluation from their my.utep.edu and Goldmine portal.

Grading

The grading system for graduate students at UTEP goes from A to F, in full letter increments. There is no B+ or A-. To keep a good standing as a graduate student, your GPA must remain at 3.0 or higher.

Make sure you understand the grading policy in each class you take.

Dropping Courses

Except for a family emergency, we strongly discourage students from dropping their classes. Nevertheless, should you need to withdraw from a class, consult the Academic Calendar. Usually, the deadline to drop a class is around Week 8.

Students who cannot complete the assignments of a course will earn either an F or an I (incomplete), depending on the policies of that particular course. Students with an incomplete need to make arrangements with the instructor to fulfill the requirements. Note: It is the student's responsibility to make these arrangements.

A student who does not complete the necessary assignments within a year of the course's completion will receive an F for that course.

Thesis Defense & Graduation

Requirements

The thesis should consist of a book-length original creative manuscript presented by a critical preface. Students may write fiction, poetry, nonfiction, screen or stage plays, or works of literary translation.
Page length requirements by genre:
- Fiction: 120 pages.
- Poetry: 60 pages.
- Screenplay: 90 pages.
- Translation: see the requirements for the specific genre above.
- For other genres, check with your thesis director.

Workflow

The following is the recommended sequence of milestones for a student to reach their third year.

1. Find a thesis project.
2. Write and submit a thesis proposal.
3. Find a thesis director.
4. Register for Thesis I.

Thesis Project

The program recommends the student decide what they'd like to do for their thesis as early as possible. This decision is a work in-progress and not a final proposal yet. As the student goes through the program, their ideas may change. However, it's important to keep their thesis in mind from early on because it helps the student choose coursework that will serve as a basis for their project. This enables the student to refine their ideas.

A thesis project can include the following: a novel, book of poems, short-story collection, memoir, script, a non-fiction book, or a book of translation. Make sure to check the Thesis Requirements above for reference in choosing your project.

Write & Submit a Thesis Proposal

The proposal is meant to help the student articulate plans and goals for their Thesis. The proposal will be submitted to the Director of the Online MFA in Creative Writing. After being approved, the student can move on to finding a thesis director.

A proposal must include the following, and the Director of the Online MFA in Creative Writing may add requirements to help the student reach a viable work plan for their project:

- **Statement & Description**
  The student will include a statement that describes and outlines their project. For example, the student may describe their plot, the themes they want to explore, the scope of the project, the length of the project, issues or arguments they would like to present in their poetry or fiction. The student can also discuss the work they've written up until that point and where they would like to take their work during their thesis coursework.

- **Bibliography**
  The student must include a bibliography that provides a theoretical and/or literary framework for their thesis.

- **Writing Sample**
  The student must include a writing sample. The sample may be 10 poems or 20 pages of prose (a chapter or short story). The sample will serve as a tool to ground the student's project. This will help the Program Director's evaluation.

Finding a Thesis Director

At the end of their *Second Year,* the student should submit the thesis proposal to the Program Director. The Program Director

can offer guidance on choosing a Thesis Director, but the student can also approach a member of the faculty to discuss whether they can serve as their thesis director. A student should keep in mind the following when finishing their second year:

- Approach their prospective thesis director early.
- Approach a faculty member with whom the student has taken at least two courses.
- Read as much of their work as possible to familiarize themselves with their future thesis director's poetics, and make sure they are a good match for the student.
- If the faculty member turns the student down, it does not mean that they do not consider their work valuable. The most common reason is overcommitment.
- Once a member of the faculty has agreed to be their thesis director, the student should email onlinemfa@utep.edu to begin the registration process, copying the Program Director and/or their thesis director.

Registering for Thesis I

To have holds removed, the student must write the proposal, submit the proposal to the Program Director for approval, and find a thesis director. Once the student has approval from either the Program Director or thesis director, the student can send an email to the Online MFA team (onlinemfa@utep.edu) copying the Thesis Director. The student should include in their email their Student ID and CRN.

Note: Thesis I is a workshop-style course. The student will be in a virtual classroom led by a faculty member and other Thesis I students. This gives the opportunity for the student to have a variety of readers. The faculty member leading Thesis I is not the same as the Thesis Director.

Thesis II

At this point, the student has worked with on their thesis for one semester. In Thesis II, that work will continue and, if successful, end with their thesis defense. To arrive at a thesis defense, the

student must plan on completing the following before graduation. The most important of these aspects is forming a Thesis Committee.

Forming a Thesis Committee

Once your thesis proposal has been approved and you have secured your thesis director, start thinking about your thesis committee—your thesis director will help you in the process. A committee consists of your director and two additional readers (referred to as your second and third readers). Your thesis director and second reader should be Department of Creative Writing faculty; the third reader is considered an "outside reader," or someone teaching at UTEP but not in the Department of Creative Writing. Ideally, these second and third readers should have some familiarity with your genre and with you as a student.

Defense and Graduation

You will defend your thesis towards the end of your last semester while you are registered in CRW 5399, Thesis II.
To defend a thesis a student must complete the following:
1. Agree on a defense date with their committee,
2. Submit their thesis to their committee 3-4 weeks before the defense date so that all the student's readers have enough time to evaluate the work.
3. Defense will be done via Zoom unless student is coming for the Graduation ceremony and prefers to do a face-to-face presentation.

How to Graduate

There is a list of student responsibilities covered in a detailed presentation that the Online MFA team can send you. Let us know if you need it. Also, check the Graduate school website: https://www.utep.edu/graduate/current-students/how-to-graduate.html and https://www.utep.edu/graduate/forms.html for timeline and forms.